



## Hartford Foundation Testimony on

### House Bill 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025

#### Appropriations Committee Proposed Budget Hearing

February 16, 2023

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Exum, Representative Paris, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, the Hartford Foundation appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on [House Bill 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2025](#).

**The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region.** As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets. Over the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$99 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$948 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation seeks to **increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods**. Higher opportunity neighborhoods are defined by a variety of factors, including low unemployment, better performing schools, lower crime and greater availability of quality, affordable housing stock.

The Hartford Foundation seeks to increase the number of Hartford residents living in higher opportunity neighborhoods both by increasing the opportunities in Hartford neighborhoods and by increasing the ability of Hartford residents to choose to move to other higher opportunity areas throughout the Greater Hartford region. In order to support these outcomes, the Foundation invests in efforts designed to increase the stability, availability, and quality of affordable housing in the Greater Hartford region; align and leverage additional investment in Hartford neighborhoods; and increase social strength and connectedness of Hartford neighborhoods.

To support these efforts, the Hartford Foundation is a part of the statewide HOMEConnecticut Campaign. The mission of HOMEConnecticut is to ensure everyone in Connecticut has access to safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing in an equitable community of their choice. The Foundation and many partners throughout the state recognize that when people have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve.

While we appreciate Governor Lamont's proposal to build new affordable housing, we ask that legislators consider supporting the [creation of a \\$5 million pilot program to support additional housing inspection capacity and enforcement. When tenants report concerns about their living conditions, towns and cities often don't have the resources to respond or monitor progress. This pilot program would support](#) municipalities with a proactive residential rental licensing or inspection program that requires regular inspections without the need for tenants' complaints and ensure landlords' compliance with local health and housing code ordinances.

Where cities have codified proactive residential rental licensing or inspection regimes, this proposal would allocate \$2.5 million per year to support additional staff and resources to carry out inspections and enforce punishment for violations. This would help ensure that cities and towns have the capacity and ability to proactively respond in a timely and ongoing manner to resolve housing quality and safety concerns, and remove from tenants the burden of maintaining safe, stable housing options.



The Foundation recognizes the value of increasing resources for housing inspections. But we also can see how randomized, unsolicited rental inspections could be viewed as intimidating and an invasion of tenants' privacy. The Foundation asks legislators and municipal officials to work with tenant rights groups to best inform implementation of housing inspection programs to avoid, or at least mitigate unintended consequences.

The Hartford Foundation has a long commitment to supporting safe housing. As part of a three-year, \$300,000 grant to the [Connecticut Fair Housing Center](#), the Foundation supported the Center's work to help tenants organize to protect their right to safe, healthy housing. The Center also assisted tenants by bringing code enforcement actions, advocating for repairs, working with municipal leaders to enforce housing codes, and obtaining reparations for tenants living in poor conditions.

In Hartford, approximately 85 percent of its housing was built before 1980 and 60 percent before 1960. Aging housing often has inefficient heat retention. The presence of potentially toxic materials such as asbestos and lead paint and leave housing frequently unsafe/unsound. Recently, several apartment complexes in the North End were closed by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development due to the buildings being chronically cited for major threats to health and safety. In 2019 the Hartford Foundation provided a grant to support residents in Clay Arsenal Apartments, Barber Gardens, and Infill in Hartford when all three complexes had their contracts with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development terminated due to conditions that threatened residents' health and safety. The Foundation awarded grants to the [Center for Leadership and Justice](#) (CLJ) and [Open Communities Alliance](#) who worked with tenants to provide leadership training, legal assistance, and technical advice to navigate the complex housing situation and relocation process.

In 2021, the Foundation provided one of its first housing advocacy grants to the [Center for Leadership and Justice](#) (CLJ) to build off of its successful No More Slumlords campaign which culminated in changes to Hartford's housing code, including a licensing program for buildings over 40 units. CLJ provided training to Hartford residents to advocate for an effective launch of the licensure program, including identifying and overcoming barriers to implementation. In 2022, the Foundation provided a second grant to CLJ to organize and advocate for enforcement of the City of Hartford's housing code. This effort sought to ensure the timely and effective implementation of Hartford's licensing program for apartment buildings with more than 4 units; identify and launch a large long term campaign on eviction, rising rents and affordable housing; and support the professional development of BIPOC resident leaders. **The inclusion of this \$5 million pilot program in the state budget would provide additional resources that Hartford and other communities need to ensure that all residents live in safe and healthy homes.**

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, philanthropy nonprofits and residents to develop effective long-term policies to ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfp.org](mailto:policy@hfp.org) or 860-548-1888.